



Triduum in Preparation for the 400th Anniversary of our Foundation

FIRST DAY

Theme: *The great example of Châtillon-sur-Chalaronne*

Introduction:

During this year of grace, we are invited to move forward in a whole-hearted manner as we celebrate this Jubilee Year that marks the fourth centenary of our foundation. Furthermore, we are also exhorted to recall and reflect on the words, events, people and especially the insights that led Vincent de Paul to give a deeper meaning to his priestly mission.

On August 23, 1617, the first Confraternity of Charity was established in Châtillon, France. This, then, is a most appropriate time to recall with grateful hearts our origins, to recall the invitation to become part of the Vincentian Family and finally, to recall the urgent need to maintain the flame of charity burning in the midst of the world, thus remaining faithful to our vocation.

Hymn

Historical Event: Everything began in Châtillon

One Sunday in August 1617, during the celebration of Mass, Vincent de Paul called upon the parishioners to assist a very needy family whose members were all infirm. Numerous women responded and visited that family during the afternoon and provided assistance. Three days later, August 23rd, 1617, marveling at the generosity of the people and recognizing the need to organize that help so that it would be effective and on-going, Vincent encouraged a group of women to create an Association for the purpose of tending to the spiritual and corporeal needs of the poor and infirm members of the community. On December 8th, 1617 this first group, called the Confraternity of Charity, was officially recognized.



Commentary:

The original story of Vincent's experience as pastor at Châtillon-les-Dombes is, in fact, a model of an integral strategy. Vincent listened attentively to the needs of the family and that reality became the theme of a moving homily and led to a commitment on the part of his listeners... ***God moved the hearts of my listeners.***

When Vincent himself went to visit the family later in the day, he met many people returning from the house of that family. He realized that the family now had much more than they needed or would be able to consume (much of the food that was brought to the home of the family would be wasted). ***There was a need for organization!***

Vincent drew up a plan and called a meeting. He formed an Association and delegated certain tasks and responsibilities to the parishioners. ***With that simple principle, a whole movement was begun!***

Vincent de Paul is known for the manner in which he delegated responsibility to other people. He listened to other people's ideas, solicited their opinions, and provided them with the resources they needed in order to carry out their mission. He made his followers co-responsible for the mission and emphasized essential values, rules and virtues (such as respect and mutual support) that provided a basis for their ministry.

Reading of the Word of God: Luke 5:17-26

Reflection:

In this passage, we see that Jesus completely transformed the life of the paralytic. Other people collaborated in this process of healing and the paralytic himself collaborated in his own proper transformation.

- *How does this passage of God's word enlighten your ministry as a volunteer?*
- *What happened to that family in Châtillon?*
- *Can you imagine what might have happened to this group of parishioners in Châtillon?*
- *How would you speak about this event to the Vincentian Volunteers of AIC?*

Commitment:

- In an atmosphere of respect and mutual trust in which the self-esteem of the other is promoted, listen attentively to those living in poverty and attempt to understand their needs and their aspirations.
- Share with the group some new action that you feel called to undertake.

Prayer:

With all our hearts, we give thanks to you, Lord, Father of mercy. You have chosen us to be members of AIC and to continue the mission of the Confraternities of Charity that were established by Vincent de Paul some four hundred years ago. Grant us the grace we need to continue this marvelous collaborative work together with those who are living in poverty so that we might build a more just and equitable world. Help us communicate your love to our brothers and sisters with enthusiasm and hope so that they, in turn, might become active in their own development. Teach us to be obedient to your will. Give us the strength we need to be authentic and hardworking within the Church and to be a force of transformation in society. May our numbers increase, so that each day, there can be more AIC volunteers in the world all convinced of Jesus' words: "Whatever you do for one of these least brothers or sisters of mine, you do for me" (Matthew 25:40). We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Hymn



Triduum in Preparation for the 400th Anniversary of our Foundation

SECOND DAY

Theme: *Following Jesus Christ, evangelizer and servant of the poor*

Introduction:

Following Jesus only occurs through an interior adhesion and faithful following of his demands. With Jesus we begin to discover that when we place our trust in God as he trusted, when we approach those who suffer as he approached people, when we defend life like he did, when we face life and death with the same hope that he faced those realities, when we are moved by the Good News like he was... when we do all of this then we have truly clothed ourselves in the spirit of Jesus Christ, the evangelizer of the poor. The first invitation that Jesus makes to every person who has experienced an encounter with him, is, in fact, an invitation to be his disciple, to walk in his footsteps and to form a community. Our greatest joy is to be his disciples.

Hymn:

Historical Event: The greatest heritage of Vincent de Paul to the members of the Confraternities of Charity

Among his many interventions, Vincent gave a conference to the Ladies of Charity (July 11, 1657) which is a jewel and therefore should be read so that we all become very familiar with it. Vincent's words help us to understand our vocation as Vincentians and also provide us (as lay persons) with an understanding of our Vincentian spirituality: *God be praised, Ladies, for grant you the grace of clothing Our Lord in his poor members, most of whom had nothing but rags to cover them, and several children were as naked as the back of my hand... how indebted to God for having given you the inspiration and the means of meeting these great needs* (CCD:XIIIb:428).¹

¹ CCD:XIIIb:428 refers to: Vincent de Paul, *Correspondence, Conference, Documents*, translators: Helen Marie Law, DC (Vol. 1), Marie Poole, DC (Vol. 1-13b), James King, CM (Vol. 1-2), Francis Germovnik, CM (Vol. 1-8, 13a-13b [Latin]), Esther Cavanagh, DC (Vol. 2), Ann Mary Dougherty, DC (Vol. 12); Evelyne Franc, DC (Vol. 13a-13b), Thomas Davitt, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Glennon E. Figge, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), John G. Nugent, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Andrew Spellman, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]); edited: Jacqueline Kilar, DC (Vol. 1-2), Marie Poole, DC (Vol. 2-13b), Julia Denton, DC [editor-in-chief] (Vol. 3-10, 13a-13b), Paule Freeburg, DC (Vol. 3), Miriam Hamway, DC (Vol. 3), Elinor Hartman, DC (Vol. 4-10, 13a-13b), Ellen Van Zandt, DC (Vol. 9-13b), Ann Mary Dougherty (Vol. 11-12); annotated: John W. Carven, CM (Vol. 1-13b); New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2009. Future references to this work will be inserted into the text using the initials [CCD] followed by the volume number, followed by the page number.

The third motive you have to continue these holy works is the honor Our Lord draws from them. Why is that? Because we honor him when we espouse his concerns, value them highly, do what he did, and carry out what he has ordained. Now, his main concern was the care of poor persons in order to heal them, console them, help them, and respect them; that was his aim. And he himself willed to be born poor, to welcome poor persons into his company, to serve those who were poor, to put himself in their place, even going so far as to say that the good and the harm we do to those who are poor he will consider as done to his divine person. What more tender love could he show for persons who were poor! And, I ask you, what love can we have for him if we do not love what he loved! That being the case, Ladies, loving those who are poor is to love him in that way; serving poor persons well is to serve him well; and imitating him is to honor him as we should. Since that is so, oh! what good reason we have to be spurred on to continue those good works and to say right now in the depths of our hearts, "Yes, I give myself to God to take care of those who are poor and to maintain the works of charity on their behalf. I will help, love, and respect them, and, after the example of Our Lord, I will love those who console them and show respect to those who visit them and bring them relief". Now, if this kind Savior is honored by this imitation, how much more should we consider it a great honor to make ourselves like him in that! Don't you think, Ladies, that this is a very powerful motive for renewing in you your first fervor? For my part, I think we should offer ourselves today to his divine majesty, that he may be pleased to animate us with his charity so that it can henceforth be said of all of you that it is the charity of Jesus Christ that urges you on (CCD:XIIIb:428, 433-434).

Commentary:

In 1647 Vincent encouraged the Ladies to persevere in the work that they had begun and his words were rooted in the vocation to which they had been called: *God inspired you to take on this good work... God doubtless then predestined and justified you, intending to glorify you one day. God has chosen you from all eternity for this purpose (CCD:XIIIb:417).* On many occasions Vincent can be heard to say: *when speaking about your work we are not talking about some simple pastime for women who are idle, rather we are referring to a true vocation that comes from God and that involves your eternal salvation.* Vincent was very clear about revealing God as one who was close to the poor and he made it clear that when dealing with the poor one encounters God.

Reflection:

- How did we receive the call to participate in AIC?
- How have we lived a life of poverty?
- What do you remember about your first home visit?
- What commitment will you (as an individual) and we (as a group) make as part of your celebration of this Jubilee Year?

Reading the Word of God: John 15:16

- What does this passage tell us about the person of Jesus?
- What do we experience ourselves called to do?

Commitment:

How can we, as members of AIC, strengthen our journey as disciples of Jesus?

**Prayer:**

Lord teach us to live with great meekness in all our relationships, to imitate your loving kindness in the way that we welcome and receive others. Lord, like you, we desire to love with tenderness and respect all those whom we encounter. We want to be friendly and kind to all those living on the peripheries. Amen.

Hymn



Triduum in Preparation for the 400th Anniversary of our Foundation

THIRD DAY

Introduction:

On this third day in which we celebrate the 400th anniversary of the birth of the Vincentian charism, let us meditate upon our commitment and the manner in which we project ourselves as members of AIC... let us also be attentive to the manner in which God has called us to continue the mission of Vincent de Paul.

Following Jesus does not mean that we can be careless about the things of this world but rather, we must engage in these undertakings with even greater responsibility, aware of the fact that *all the faithful of Christ, of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity (Lumen Gentium, #40).*

Hymn

Historical Event:

The ever renewed practice of charity that is done with a profound love for all those in need, that is done for the infirm, abandoned children, the elderly, the hungry and the naked and the imprisoned etc., explains the living faith of Vincent de Paul and at the same time reveals his universal vision of the commitment of the laity with regard to the existing situation of poverty (a situation that in Vincent's era destroyed the health of countless individuals and placed their eternal salvation in danger). Vincent felt this his charitable social action needed more and so he solicited the help of generous laymen and women to reach out to those areas of an impoverished world, those places where he himself was unable to travel... When Vincent distributed the first Rule of the Confraternity of Charity, that rule was an example of the tenderness of the human foresight that would guide the steps of thousands of devoted women and men as they reached out to the most needy members of society. The former Ladies of Charity, today known as the Volunteers of Charity, claim Vincent de Paul as their Founder and thus, the Founder of the International Association of Charity (AIC). What sustains and defines these Volunteers of Charity as they minister in the midst of an ever-changing secularized world is their participation and

sharing in the Vincentian spirit... a spirit that is inexhaustible because of its evangelical and universal nature².

We can state, then, that the volunteers have a commitment: a civic, Christian and Vincentian commitment. More importantly, we can provide a specific profile of these volunteers and see that they are committed, generous, responsible and competent men and women who are rooted in the project of St. Vincent de Paul. Their mission is the following: *to struggle against all forms of poverty and exclusion... and to do this through transformative initiatives and projects; to work with their sisters and brothers who live in poverty, encouraging them to discover and affirm their strengths, supporting their on-going formation and promoting a way of life that enables them to live with dignity; to denounce injustice and to initiate activities that put pressure on decision-makers so that eventually the causes of poverty are eradicated³.*

The foundation at Châtillon of the first "Charity" was followed by a multitude of other Confraternities, which quickly covered Christianity with an extensive network that transformed the face of the Church and society. By placing women at the service of the most humble, Vincent overturned the established hierarchies of society. He asked those women to become servants of the poor and assured them that they would find in those "lords and masters" the same features of the Judge who would welcome them into the Kingdom on the last day... The charity which, yesterday and today, animated and continues to animate the groups established by Saint Vincent cannot be reduced to a mere "handout", no matter how well organized it may be. Such charity is also not simply a matter of "righting the wrongs" of organized society... such charity would be an undertaking in which a good conscience is restored to the established order. It would be like the ambulance service that follows an army to pick up the wounded. Without neglecting this function, however, the charity that we are referring to is much more than that... it is a question of changing the marching orders and the interconnected hierarchies, so that the weak and the small are no longer oppressed, but respected, and given an opportunity⁴.

Reflection:

- What stood out in the above text?
- What does the text invite us to do?
- Are we willing to fulfill the demands that Vincent de Paul places upon us? How will we do this?

Commitment:

How can we put into practice that which we have experienced during the celebration of this Triduum?

² Antonio Orcajo, *San Vicente de Paúl y los movimientos laicos vicencianos* (Saint Vincent de Paul and Vincentian Lay Movements), <http://vincentians.com/es/san-vicente-de-paul-y-los-movimientos-laicos-vicencianos/>.

³ This statement is taken from the AIC Charter (2016).

⁴ *San Vicente de Paúl y las Cofradías de Caridad* (Saint Vincent de Paul and the Confraternities of Charity) in *En tiempos de Vicente de Paúl y hoy* (In the times of Vincent de Paul and Today), vol. I, <http://vincentians.com/es/san-vicente-de-paul-y-las-cofradias-de-caridad/>

Prayer:

Lord, Merciful Father, you who instilled in Saint Vincent de Paul a great concern for the evangelization of the poor, infuse your Spirit in the hearts of his followers so that as we hear the cry of your abandoned children, we may run to their assistance, "like someone who runs to put out a fire". Revive within us the flame of the Charism, that flame which has animated our missionary life for 400 hundred years. We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, "the Evangelizer of the Poor". Amen.